

COFFREN HOUSE, STORE
10007 Croom Road
Croom
Prince Georges County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-988-A

HABS
MD
17-CROM,
2A-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

COFFREN STORE

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Location: 10007 Croom Road, Croom, Prince Georges County, Maryland 20772

Present Owner: Guy Rogers Naylor and Ellen Naylor, his wife

Present Use: Formerly used as a store building, now vacant.

Significance: The Coffren Store is a rare example of a well-preserved, mid 19th-century general merchandise store. Small local stores of this type-- one-room utilitarian structures including a Post Office-- once commonly dotted the rural landscape of the county. Most have long since disappeared, and the few others remaining have been altered. The Coffren Store is the only intact example in the county. The store was built for John W. Coffren, a prosperous merchant and tobacco planter whose dwelling house sits just south of the store.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1853. This date is based on the fact that John Coffren received the store property through a deed from Robert I. Young in October of 1853 which stated "all that land on which John W. Coffren now lives..." (Deed ON 1:452). Also, a deed for an addition 11 acres in July of 1856 describes the property as, "beginning on the main road leading by said Coffren's Store..." (Deed CSM 1:310).

2. Original and subsequent owners:

1853 Deed ON 1:452, 3 October 1853
Robert I. Young
To
John W. Coffren
All that land on which John W. Coffren now resides, being part of "Pages Rest" on the west side of the road leading from St. Thomas Church to Upper Marlboro, 1-1/2 acres.

1856 Deed CSM 1:310, 30 July 1856
William H. Tuck and C.C. Magruder, trustees
To

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John W. Coffren
18 acres including Coffren's store. Sold in
1851 to Robert I. Young, Young has sold the
same to Coffren, on which Coffren now lives.

- 1876 Equity #1115, 26 September 1876
J.P. Veazey, trustee- for the sale of the real
estate of John W. Coffren, deceased
James W. Curley
vs.
Susan H. Coffren
- 1880 Deed WAJ 1:509, 18 June 1880
J. Parker Veazey, trustee
To
Alice and Rosalie Coffren
58 acres in Croom including 18 acres sold by
Tuck and Magruder, trustees to John W. Coffren,
1856.
- 1889 Deed JWB 10:675, 14 March 1889
Josephine Owings, widow
To
Susanna Curtin
58 acres in Croom, conveyed by Thomas Owings,
trustee to Josephine Owings, same land conveyed
by Trustee J. Parker Veazey to Alice and
Rosalie Coffren.
- 1889 Deed JWB 24:179, 20 March 1889
Albert and Susanna Curtin
To
William H. Gibbons
18 acres on road from Upper Marlboro to St.
Thomas Church (conveyed by Tuck and Magruder
to John W. Coffren, 1856).
- 1893 Deed JWB 24:384, 9 May 1893
William H. Gibbons and wife, Mary Gibbons
To
Jeremiah Ryon
3 acres on the road from Upper Marlboro to
Nottingham, with buildings.
- 1900 Deed JB 12:70, 30 June 1900
Jeremiah Ryon
To
Edith May Ryon
3 acres on Nottingham Road, with buildings

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- 1904 Deed 16:389, 18 July 1904
 Edith May Ryon
 To
 Arthur B. Duley and Margarette Duley
 3 acres on the Road from Upper Marlboro to
 Nottingham, together with buildings.
- 1952 Deed 1553:357, 20 October 1952
 Margarette Duley, widow, et al
 To
 Allene Green
 3 acres in Nottingham District
- 1984 Deed 5925:224, 2 July 1984
 Allene Green
 To
 Debra Anne Naylor and Peter Richard Boundy, 1/2
 interest; and G. Rogers Naylor and Ellen Duffy
 Naylor
 2.75 acres

4. Builder: The store was built for John W. Coffren.

5. Alterations and additions: The Coffren Store does not appear to have undergone any significant changes and/or alterations to its original fabric.

B. Historical Context:

A look through G.M. Hopkins 1878 Atlas of Prince Georges County reveals dozens of small community stores which dotted the rural landscape of the county. In a county such as Prince Georges which was shaped by agriculture, rural general merchandise stores such as Coffren's Store provided the necessary items that families could not produce themselves on the farm, such as tools, seeds, fabrics, dry goods, and a few luxuries as well, such as ribbons and notions, and tobacco. Also, as stated by John R. Stilgoe in his Common Landscapes of America, "Above all, storekeepers operated social centers. They sold liquor and accommodated travelers, and many kept post offices, where householders gathered for letters and newspapers.... The stores gradually became the popularly accepted foci of local social and economic activity..." (pgs 73-74). Thus, the significance of general merchandise stores such as Coffren's to the communities in which they were located cannot be understated.

John W. Coffren built his store, presumably in 1853, on land for which he received title that same year, namely

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1-1/2 acres of "Pages Rest" located on "the west side of road leading from St. Thomas Church (Page's Chapel) to Upper Marlboro" (Deed ON 1:452). Coffren increased his commercial venture a few years later, in 1859, when he became the highest bidder on a piece of property adjoining the store lot, 11 acres "in which are situated two dwellings, a blacksmith shop and a wheelwright shop..." (Equity #258). The blacksmith and wheelwright shops were operated by lessees and the tenant houses on the property rented. Most of Coffren's wares-- which ranged from hardware, tools, farm supplies and equipment, to fabrics, dishes and glassware, medicines and notions-- were purchased from suppliers in Baltimore, Maryland (according to receipts found in the administration of his estate). Such supplies could easily have been brought up the Patuxent River to Nottingham, a nearby landing and warehouse site.

His obvious prosperity allowed him to erect a fine, side-hall-and-double-parlor plan residence on his property in 1861. Coffren's prominence as the community's storekeeper and postmaster allowed him to rise to other significant positions. In 1865 he was appointed to the first Board of County School Commissioners, representing Nottingham, Aquasco and Surratt's Districts. He was also a vestryman for nearby St. Thomas' Church.

John W. Coffren died in 1874, leaving a wife, Susan H. Coffren, and four children, Alice V., Rosalie E., John W. and Eugene E. Coffren. Susan Coffren continued to operate the store after her husband's death. As stated in a later equity case, "said Susan H. Coffren is now engaged in conducting and carrying on (a) mercantile business on her own in said building or store house..." (Equity #1115). The store & post office also appears in her name on Hopkin's 1878 Atlas. Despite an equity suit brought by Baltimore distributors for debts which were inherited along with the business, Susan and her daughters, Alice and Rosalie, were able to retain ownership of the property. In June of 1880 the property was described as fifty-eight acres, acquired as four separate tracts, including a store house, dwelling house, blacksmith shop, wheelwright shop, three tenant houses and other necessary outbuildings (Equity #1115).

In May of 1893 the Coffren store and dwelling house, on three acres, was sold to Jeremiah Ryon (Deed JWB 24:384). Ryon owned a nearby farm and was said to have moved the corn crib, hog pen and barn now on the property to this site, as well as adding the current kitchen wing which replaced an earlier, separate kitchen building (King p.

8). Ryon later sold the property to his daughter and son-in-law, Margarette and Arthur Duley in 1904 (Deed 16:389). The Duleys continued to operate the store until it finally closed in 1948. It was purchased by the current owners in July of 1984. They have undertaken much work on the house but the store building has remained unchanged.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a mid-19th century, one-room general merchandise store. Intended as a rural, utilitarian structure, it is void of ornamentation. As an unaltered representative of a 19th-century, rural tradition of local trade and commerce, it is without equal in the county. The store remains virtually intact with its original counters, bins, post office window, cash drawer, etc. Thus, it provides a unique opportunity to see into 19th-century rural America.

2. Condition of fabric: The store building is in good to fair condition. In need of repair and maintenance, it appears to be structurally sound and intact, without additions or other intrusions to its original architectural integrity.

B. Description of exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This is a two-story, three-bay-by-one-bay, saltbox-shaped structure with a catslide gable roof. It measures approximately 24' x 30'. It has a three-bay first-story facade with the entry to the center and a two-bay second-story (with the second story windows over those on the first).

2. Foundations: The building rests on a brick foundation.

3. Walls: The walls are of rough cut wood siding, framed with plain corner boards.

4. Structural system, framing: The store is of (balloon) frame construction. The floor joists for the second floor are left exposed in the ceiling of the store. The rafters are exposed in the storage area of the second floor (to the rear) and are circular sawn and labeled for assembly with roman numerals.

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5. Porches, stoops: A simple shed-roofed porch supported by four plain wooden posts runs the length of the facade. The porch roof is covered with corrugated metal and it has a wooden floor resting on a raised concrete foundation with two concrete steps. The side entry towards the rear has no porch or stoop, only two concrete steps.

6. Chimneys: A single, interior, square brick stack covered with stucco rises from the southeast side, just below the roof ridge.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Both the front and rear side doorways are surrounded by a narrow board with an inner bead of almost equal width. The northeast front doorway has crude double doors which are of wide vertical boards (backed with narrower horizontal boards). They each have a small single-pane window cut in the top and there is a norfolk latch, and a key hole without a plate. The door at the southeast side (towards the rear) is similar, being of wide vertical boards but with a single long window cut-out down the center and with three flat iron bars nailed horizontally across it. There is a porcelain knob and a key hole without a plate.

b. Windows: The windows on the northeast front facade (first- and second-story) are surrounded by a narrow torus molding with a recessed inner bead projecting outward. Elsewhere, the molding is like that of the doorway. There is no windowhead ornamentation on any of the windows. They are all six-over-six-light sash windows (with the exception of the first-story window on the northwest side which is a two-over-two-light sash window). The windows are all covered with iron bars, running both vertically and horizontally.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The store has a gable, catslide roof covered with corrugated metal.

b. Cornice, eaves: Along the northeast front roof-line there is a narrow boxed cornice, with a plain, narrow frieze board with a piece of crown molding. At the rear there is simply a boxed cornice. There is no ornament along the gable ends.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The interior of the store is one large open space with a counter running from the front wall down each side and along the rear, with a break to the center rear. Here, a hinged section of counter which would allow the storekeeper to pass through would have completed the continuous counter (now missing). Near this space to the west side is the cash drawer, under the counter. Shelves, or indications of shelves, line the walls. A row of deep, wide bins line the northwest wall. There is a postal window near the front doorway, to the northwest side. To the center of the southeast wall is a brick chimney which once accommodated a stove pipe for a pot-bellied stove. At the rear, south corner is an enclosed stairway. At the foot of the stair, on the southeast wall, is the back door.

b. Second floor: The second floor is divided into two rooms. At the top of the stairway, to the rear of the store is the unfinished storeroom. Here the roof and walls are exposed, and there is a rough wooden floor. At the top of the steps, up one step, is a doorway into the front room. This room is finished with plaster walls (falling off and exposing the lath and plaster in places).

2. Stairways: The partially boxed, single-run stairway in the south corner of the store begins at the side rear doorway and continues towards the front of the store, along the southeast wall. Beginning a few steps up, the stairway is boxed using wide beaded boarding. There once was a door here that has since been removed. The wooden steps are worn and unfinished and a rough, wood branch nailed to the wall serves as a handrail.

3. Flooring: There is narrow, unfinished wooden flooring in the first floor, and unfinished wide board flooring in the front room on the second floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls of the store itself (as evidenced from the rear wall where it is falling down) is lath and plaster with wide board paneling laid horizontally over it. Plain board shelves line the walls on all sides. The ceiling is left uncovered, revealing the floor joists which are lined with nails for hanging merchandise. On the second floor, the walls and ceiling of the storeroom are left exposed

and in the front room they are covered with lath and plaster.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front doorway is wide to accommodate double doors. It is surrounded with a plain trim with an inner bead. There is a box-lock, and iron brackets at each side support the barred door. The wooden doors have horizontal boards nailed on the inside. The rear doorway also has plain trim with an inner bead. The doorway on the second floor has a plain surround with a five-panel door (two long panels above with a horizontal panel at the lock rail and two smaller panels below).

b. Windows: Like the doorways, the window surrounds consist of a plain wide board with an inner bead.

6. Counter and bins: The counter which runs all around the store (three sides) is of bead board with a plain, beveled-edge piece along the top, under the counter. The counter top consists of two, wide unfinished boards. The counter is open to the center rear where a hinged piece that could be lifted to allow the storekeeper to pass would have been attached (now gone). Under the counter to the west of this opening is the cash drawer. The bottom of the wooden drawer is sectioned off for dollar bills with two cut-out cups for change. A separate piece with cut-out cups for change fits in the front and lifts out. There is a bell mechanism to the rear of the drawer (not working but presumably to alert the store keeper when the drawer is being opened). Lining the northwest wall are a series of pull-out bins (like large drawers) for storage.

7. Post office window: At the front of the store, along the northwest side of the counter is a post office. There is a small window to the center where mail could be passed through, with a cast letter slot underneath. On either side of the actual window area are rows of boxes, only two of which, to either side, can be seen through the glass. On the far left side is a row of eight boxes with key locks. There is a broad shelf supported by brackets in front of the window. To the back of the post office window are the open boxes. There is a door on the actual window and under it is the cash drawer that slides out with cups for change. Also connected with the post office function of the store is what appears to be a mail slot cut into the front wall,

presumably for night deposit.

8. Mechanical systems: The store is wired for electricity but it appears that the only heat was provided by a stove. The chimney flue with a hole for a stove pipe is located on the southeast wall. Wire hanging along the principal beam supporting the floor joists (to support the stove pipe) suggest that the stove sat on the floor on the patrons side of the counter.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The store faces northeast onto Croom Road. A horseshoe drive passes in front of the store, off the road. The storekeepers house (and other outbuildings) are adjacent to the store, to the southeast. The property slopes off into a gully to the rear with the house and store sitting on the high point.

2. Historic landscape: The store is oriented towards Croom Road, located near a bend. This was a major north-south road for this rural area. Its location made it easily accessible for river freight from Nottingham, and later for the railroad at Croom or Linden Stations. The store once formed the nucleus for this small, rural community which also included and blacksmith and a wheelwrights shop (with other dwellings and St. Thomas Church down the road); with a school house and church meeting hall (now Moore's Store) added later.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

King, Marina. "Maryland Historical Trust, Historic Sites Inventory Form, John W. Coffren House and Store (Green House and Store)," prepared January 1986.

Prince Georges County Land Records, Deeds and Equity proceeding as cited in text.

Prince Georges County Register of Wills, Wills and Administrations as cited in text.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of Prince Georges County, Maryland, Washington: G.M. Hopkins, Publishers, 1878.

Stilgoe, John R. Common Landscapes of America, 1580 to 1845. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1982.

Prepared by: Catherine C. Lavoie
Historian
February 1991

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Coffren Store was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert J. Kapsch, chief and the Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince Georges County Historic Preservation Commission to document sites throughout the county. A one year project was begun in January of 1989. Upon its completion, a second phase was begun, in March of 1990, also to span approximately one years time. The site selection was made by Gail Rothrock, director, and Susan G. Pearl, research historian, for the HPC. They also provided access to their research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of county history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie, who accompanied the photographer into the field for on-site inspection.